

Message Text

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ACTION NEA-10

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R 170908Z MAY 75

FM AMEMBASSY DAMASCUS

TO SECSTATE WASHDC 3465

INFO AMEMBASSY AMMAN

AMEMBASSY BEIRUT

AMEMBASSY CAIRO

/AMEMBASSY JIDDA 341

AMEMBASSY TEL AVIV

AMEMBASSY ANKARA

C O N F I D E N T I A L DAMASCUS 1808

BEIRUT PASS BAGHDAD

EO 11652: GDS

TAGS: PFOR, MILI, SY, IZ

SUBJECT: SYRIAN-IRAQI EUPHRATES DISPUTE

1. SYRIAN-IRAQI DISPUTE OVER EUPHRATES IS VERGING ON FURTHER DETERIORATION AS SARG AWAITS ARRIVAL OF PRESIDENT SADAT EARLY EVENING MAY 17. RECENT SERIES OF BOMB EXPLOSIONS IN SYRIA VIEWED BY SARG AS PERPETRATED BY IRAQ. ONE SYRIAN TOLD US THAT SARG OFFICER WITH WHOM HE DISCUSSED CRISIS SPECULATED THAT WE NOA WITNESSING ONLY THE BEGINNING OF SLIDE INTO MUCH MORE DANGEROUS SITUATION IN WHICH THERE DISTINCT POSSIBILITY OF CLASHES BETWEEN OPPOSING FORCES.

2. REGARDING SYRIAN MILITARY PRECAUTIONS, WE UNDERSTAND FROM BRITISH EMDASSY SOURCE THAT QAMISHLE AIRPORT, WHOSE RUNWAY WAS LENGTHENED IN ORDER HANDLE MILITARY AIRCRAFT BUT WAS WASHED OUT IN LATE WINTER
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RAINS, IS NOW UNDERGOING CRASH REPAIR EFFORTS. BRITISH

EMBOFF SPECULATED THAT SARG MAY HAVE SUDDENLY DISCOVERED VULNERABILITY OF NE OIL-GAS FIELDS AND WANT TO INCREASE DEFENSIVE CAPABILITY IN AREA.

3. IRAQI TRADE CENTER DOWNTOWN DAMASCUS NOW CLOSED. ALSO, DIRECTOR OF SYRIAN AIRLINES OFFICE BAGHDAD HAS RETURNED TO DAMASCUS. IN PRESS INTERVIEW HE ACCUSED IRAQIS OF HARRASSING HIS STAFF AND ALLEGED THAT "FELLOW TRAVELLERS OF FASCIST REGIME ARRANGED ACCIDENT WITH AUTOMOBILE BRINGING BACK EMPLOYEES TO DAMASCUS.³

4. SYRIAN MEDIA HAVE GIVEN PROMINENCE TO STEADY STREAM OF ACCUSATIONS AGAINST IRAQ. MAY 16 PRESS DEVOTED ATTENTION TO ALLEGATIONS OF "PERSECUTION" OF NATIONALIST AND PROGRESSIVE ELEMENTS IN IRAQI MILITARY. REPORTS CLAIMED THAT GOI HAS TRANSFERRED AND DISMISSED MANY OFFICERS, INCLUDING BRIG. ABD AL-MUNIM LAFTAH, LISTED AS COMMANDER OF IRAQ'S EASTERN DISTRICT. PRESS ALSO CHARGED THAT SHAHIR SHAHHUD, ALIAS ABU JABBAR, SUPPOSEDLY DIRECTOR OF PALESTINE AFFAIRS "IN THE COMMAND OF THE RULING ORGANIZATION IN BAGHDAD," FLED TO LONDON AND NOW IN AMMAN. REASON FOR HIS FLIGHT GIVEN AS HIS "STRONG OPPOSITION TO MARCH 6 ACCORD BY WHICH IRAQI REGIME SURRENDERED ARAB LAND IN ARABISTAN AND SHATT AL-ARAB."

5. COMMENT: IT NOW SEEMS REASONABLY CLEAR THAT SYRIA HAS INTENTIONALLY DIMINISHED EUPHRATES FLOW IN ORDER TO EMPHASIZE ITS CONTROL OVER THIS PRESSURE POINT AND TO DISCOURAGE IRAQI INTERFERENCE IN SYRIAN DOMESTIC POLITICS. RUMORS ARE STRONG THAT SADAT WILL TRY HIS HAND AT CALMING DISPUTE WHICH SO FAR HAS DEFIED VARIOUS ARAB MEDIATION ATTEMPTS.
MURPHY

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